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THE LATIN WORK OF THE OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL¹

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Communities, like the individuals that compose them, are all different yet all alike. Location, size, natural advantages, business interests, may vary, yet there is a distinctly human interest inherent in them all, and it is this human interest in relation to the teaching of Latin, with the requirements it makes and the desires it creates, that I wish to discuss today.

Because I have been requested to speak of the Latin department in the Oak Park High School and to give an account of some of its activities, I shall draw my illustrations from circumstances coming within my personal experience there during the past nine years. The number of pupils attending this school is now 1,133. Of these, 552 are in the Latin classes of the four different years. The number studying Greek is not so large, but it includes some of our best pupils, and they are offered a three-years' course in this subject.

It is a matter of much good fortune to us in Oak Park that the great majority of our pupils come from environments in which education and refinement prevail. In many cases I know it has been the parents' wish that has caused the boy or girl to elect Latin and perhaps Greek; in many cases too it has been the parents' determination that has caused the pupil to continue the work. Another influence of potent force with us is the fact that a large number of our young people are definitely preparing for some special college or university whose entrance terms require, or at least recommend, the classical training. But the most stimulating influence in any community is the pupils' human interest.

To arouse and hold this interest three conditions must be maintained: (1) the pupil must understand what he is trying to

¹ Read at the Michigan Classical Conference, March 31, 1916, with stereopticon illustrations.

do, (2) he must be kept busy with some visible end in view, and (3) he must meet with some success in arriving at that end. The value of the first requisite, understanding, is apparent at all times and particularly during the first year, when a large part of the class-hour must be spent in explanation of the lesson for the following day, so that energy may not be lost through lack of comprehension. The second requisite, activity directed toward some end, is of special importance in holding the interest of high-school pupils, whose youthful exuberance demands an outlet. The third requisite, success, is as vital as either of the other two. We all need to win a victory occasionally to convince ourselves and others that we have the power of conquest in us. Moreover, it must be a real victory, not merely the *insignia victoriae*, if it is to bring permanent satisfaction.

But understanding, purposeful activity, and success are not the only things to be sought. There are also *multae artes eximiae harum administrarum comitesque virtutum*. Of these I shall mention only two, namely, the attractiveness of the setting in which our study of the ancient classics may be cast, and the variation that may be introduced into this supplementary work.

Some criticism has arisen in recent years of what is known as artificial stimulation of interest, the so-called sugar-coated doses of Latin, and the statement is made that Latin never can be made easy. Truly it cannot, but need it for that reason be made mechanical, with all the life taken from it? Good scholarship, applicable to coming needs whether in or out of school, must, of course, be our great aim, second only to the development of character, but I am convinced that some seeming digression from the steady grind is in reality an ingression into the true spirit of the classical languages and of the people who spoke them.

Such supplementary exercises should always be subservient to the main purpose of our work, and in this connection I wish to emphasize the fact that the activities mentioned below have been distributed over a period of nine years and no one of them has been given an undue amount of time and effort. In order to keep them in this subordinate position and to avoid the possibility of allowing them to make any serious encroachment upon the pupil's time,

as well as to add the stimulus of novelty to their charm, we have taken them up separately, varying them from year to year and changing their form with different classes. For example, one year we gave a Roman banquet to which all third- and fourth-year Latin pupils were invited; another year we had a Latin club organized for first-year pupils only; at another time we prepared a Latin exhibit in which the members of all classes participated; for two years we published a Latin paper, and we are now, after an interval of five years, making our second Latin calendar.

Besides these more extensive enterprises, we have tried several plans on a smaller scale for individual classes, such as the following: some of the first-year classes exchanged Latin valentines last month; one of the second-year sections at the close of the year 1913-14 attended Caesar's funeral; a Cicero class a year ago organized itself into a Roman state; and both Caesar and Cicero classes have given a number of short plays in English based upon the text that had been read.

The publication of the Latin paper *Latine* was an interesting task, though by no means an easy one. The greatest difficulty was to devise new schemes suited to the needs of such a paper. Short stories in Latin, letters from friends and former pupils who were kind enough to write to us in that language, quotations from Latin authors or from publications similar to our own, jokes familiar to our readers, and advertisements from the Chicago elevated trains or from local stores formed the main source of our supply of material.

Our Latin calendars contain only notices of events occurring on school days and in most cases concerned with school affairs. The programs of the general assembly and of the various organizations of the school, class proceedings, athletic events, etc., appear in these items.

On the occasion of Caesar's funeral, the *lectus funebris* stood in the classical room, and upon it was placed a worn copy of the *De Bello Gallico* to lie in state under its purple coverlet until the funeral procession was formed, when it was borne to a vacant lot across the street and cremated with appropriate ceremonies. The ashes

were brought back to the classical room, where they still rest at the bottom of one of our classic flower urns.

The Latin valentines contained various sentiments, often expressed in questionable Latin, but not difficult to understand. Thus one boy wished to say, "Love me, love my dog," but what appeared on his card was *Ama me, ama meum cenam*. Whether his error was due to greater familiarity with the word *cena* than with *canis*, or whether it was due to the proverbial fondness a boy has for his dinner is a question still unanswered.

The class that formed the miniature Roman republic was arbitrarily divided by the teacher into eight centuries, whose duty it was to elect two consuls each to take charge of the affairs of the state a week at a time. Certain members of the class immediately declared themselves candidates for the offices, their names were accepted, and they were allowed a few minutes at the beginning of two of the recitation periods to make known their special qualifications. Followers of the candidates aided them by posting electioneering signs asking the centuries to make their friends consuls and adding some complimentary remark, such as *Bonus vir est*, or something similar.

The voting was done as nearly as possible in accordance with Roman custom, and one of the valuable parts of the process, aside from the good spirit it created, was the fact that it necessitated more thorough study of Roman methods of election than would ordinarily be given to this subject.

On the appointed day the consuls took the vows of their office and entered upon the performance of their duties. In view of the fact that the ancient Romans named special days on which certain religious rites should be observed, our officers caused their people to set aside two days out of each week for tasks almost equally binding. These were Monday, which was to be devoted to prose, and Wednesday, when ten or fifteen minutes were to be given to written sight translation from the Latin.

The Caesar and Cicero plays have been short presentations in dramatic form of situations described by the Latin authors, such as "The tragedy of Orgetorix," "Caesar's encounter with the Veneti," "The treachery of Ambiorix," "The conviction of the

Catilinarian conspirators," etc. By outlining in acts and scenes the main events of the story, by assigning the impersonations of such characters as Orgetorix, Dumnorix, Ambiorix, Sabinus, Cotta, Lentulus, Gabinius, and even Caesar and Cicero to some of the pupils, and by asking others to study the interpretation of the emotions and feelings of the citizens, the soldiers, the senate, etc., there has been furnished an opportunity for a comprehensive view of situations, for an appreciation of the effect of human passions, for an understanding of the complexity of human problems, and for a realization of the results of human actions such as can never be gained from the sectional translation afforded by the ordinary day's work. These productions have not been in any sense finished, nor were they intended to be, but they have served merely as an active form of review and as an effective way of emphasizing the contents and meaning of the text translated.

Nothing that has been mentioned thus far is peculiar to the Oak Park High School. That in which our classical department is unique is its beautiful classical room. Located on the second floor of the school building between the English club room and one of the ordinary recitation rooms, this classic spot is within easy reach of all who wish to see it. It is not merely a show room used only on special occasions, but is in active service the entire day. Regular class work is done here, conferences are held here, and some of the clubs meet here. Because of the fact that it can be united with the English club room by raising the large door between the two, it furnishes a convenient center for many of the social gatherings of the school. It is typically classical in its construction, from its beamed ceiling adorned with Greek moldings to its bordered floor bearing the cordial Latin greeting *Salve*. The coloring is white and buff and around the walls runs a frieze of Flaxman's illustrations of the *Odyssey*, finished in tones of pinkish brown. Here are pictured Penelope departing with Odysseus from her father's home, Athena asking Zeus's help for the Greeks, the suitors of Penelope reveling in the home of Odysseus, Penelope unraveling by night the web she had woven by day, Nausicaa and her friends playing ball, Odysseus shipwrecked and clinging to a bit of his shattered ship, Nestor offering sacrifice, and Odysseus return-

ing to Penelope. At one side of the room is a Lararium, the home of our household gods, and in it a small Pompeian figure suggests the artistic spirit of the ancient Romans, if not the reality of their Lares and Penates. Over two of the doors are Latin quotations, *Nil mali intret* and *Procul o, procul este profani*, and over the larger door is the following English quotation: "The great man ever has sought the sacred fire from olden books or from the older stars." The furniture, with the exception of that which we have felt was needed for modern service, namely, a blackboard and some chairs with arms, is strictly in accord with classic taste. There are, a white marble table with exquisite base, a white marble bench, dark-green chairs of Roman design, two brass candelabra, a white cabinet for books and papers, a bust of Caesar, a small statue of Mercury unbinding his sandal, an urn in the form of a truncated column decorated with figures of dainty Greek maidens, and a smaller flower urn standing on a Romanized Ionic base. Everything unites to make this room a vivid reproduction of Greek and Roman ideals of beauty in architecture and furnishings, and the effect is most attractive and inspiring.